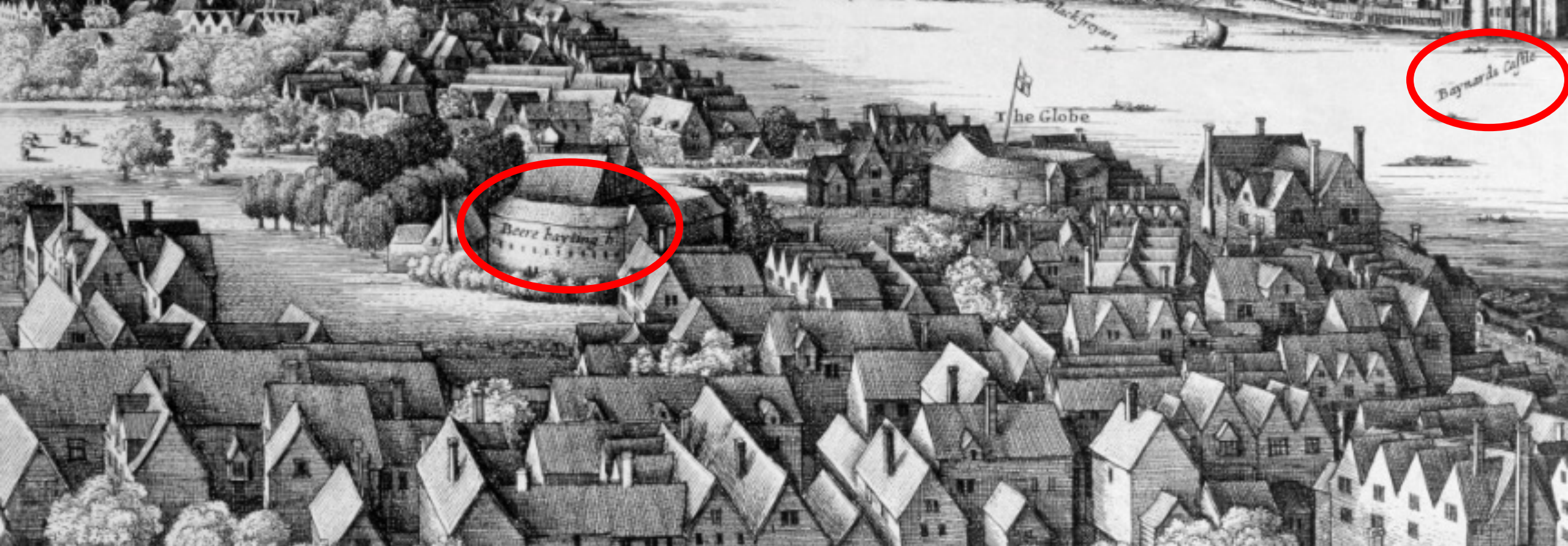


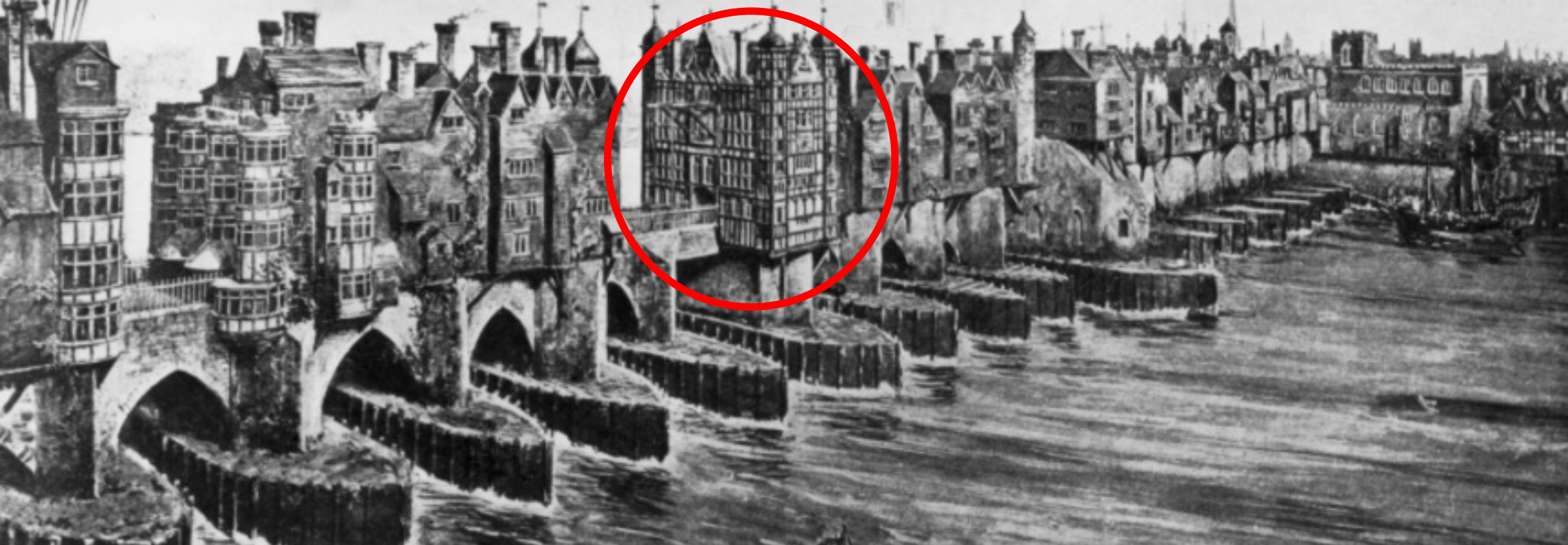
# Seventeenth century London

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Part 8



This area, known as Bankside, is where Shakespeare lived and worked in the late 1500s and early 1600s...



Old London Bridge



## **Nonsuch House**

This wildly eccentric, gaudily painted, meticulously carved Renaissance palace was the jewel in the crown of London Bridge.

Made from wood it was prefabricated in Holland and erected in 1577-79, replacing the medieval drawbridge gate. At four storeys it was the biggest building on the bridge, straddling the whole street and lurching over the Thames, affording its illustrious occupants spectacular views of the metropolis. Its tulip-bulb cupolas were admired from miles around and there was truly nonsuch like this strange building anywhere else in London.

The Great Fire only consumed a new block of houses at the north end of London Bridge, separated from the rest by a gap.

Nonsuch House, built on the 7th and 8th arches from the Southwark end, survived – only to be dismantled with the rest of the houses a hundred years later.

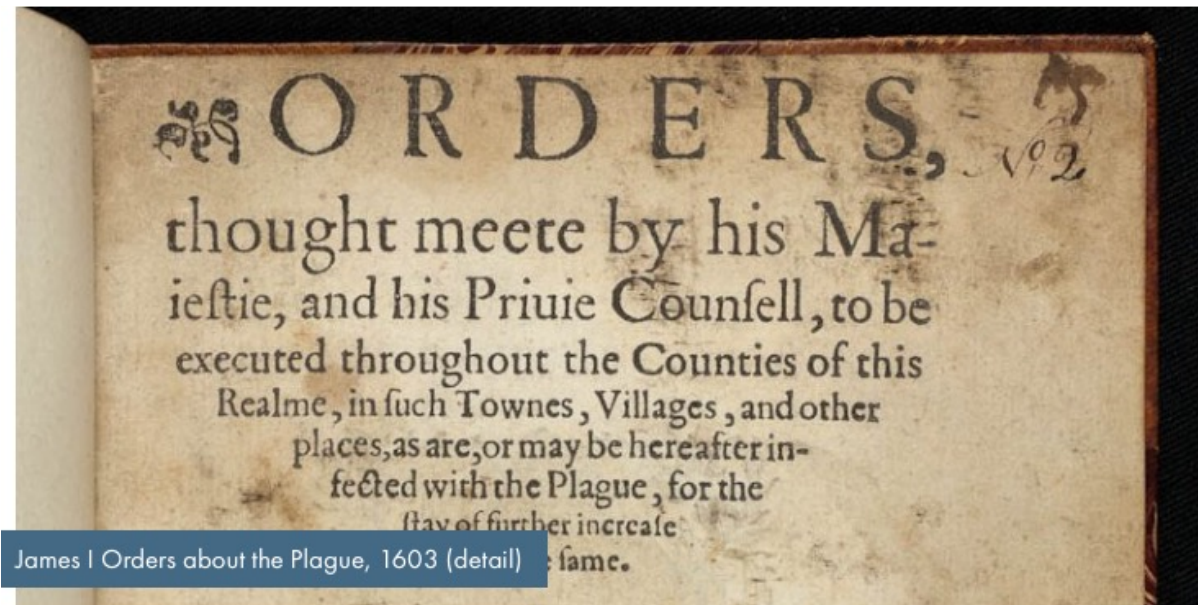
## The plague of 1603 (62 years before the last large outbreak)

The year 1603 in Shakespeare's England was, as Thomas Dekker noted wryly in a bestselling pamphlet, a 'Wonderfull Yeare'.

On March 24th, Queen Elizabeth I died. In the absence of an heir, the throne was passed to James VI of Scotland. James had barely got comfortable on his new English throne before a devastating outbreak of plague swept through London and the surrounding countryside. It was to be one of the deadliest instances of plague in England's history, claiming around a quarter of London's population (similar to the Great Plague of 1665).

Among James' first actions as English monarch was to issue a book of Orders\* relating to the plague outbreak, outlining rules and procedures to be followed in an attempt to stop the spread of the disease and to aid those suffering from it.

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/sovereign-and-sick-city-1603/>



James I Orders about the Plague, 1603 (detail)

The first half of the text is dedicated to physical orders enforced to try and control the plague in London and the surrounding areas. Houses were 'to be closed up' for 6 weeks if one of the inhabitants fell ill, and the sick were encouraged to be 'restrained from resorting into company of others' for fear of spreading infection. If they did leave the house, they were to mark their clothes so as to warn others of their disease - they could be overseen by watchmen and breaking these orders could be punished by a spell in the stocks. Moreover, 'clothes, bedding and other stuffe as hath been worne and occupied by the infected of this disease' were collected and burnt. But James also took measures to ensure the sick would not lose everything: he ordered that collections should be made in order to support those who were locked in their houses and to replace their possessions.

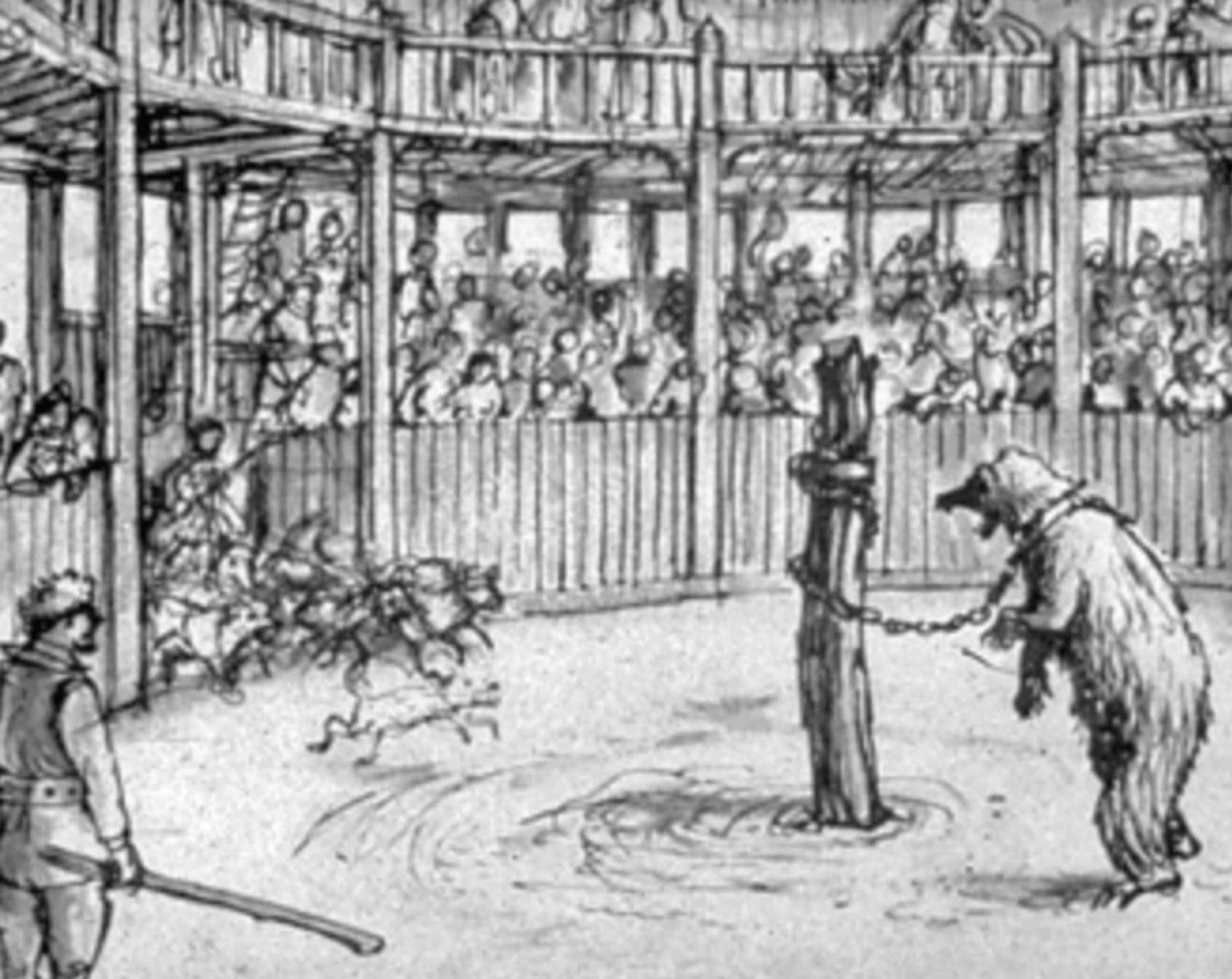
The focus of the book then shifts to provide an illuminating insight into Early Modern medicine. In the second half, it prints several preventative and remedial cures recommended by physicians which were designed to be put up in public, ensuring even the poorest members of society had access to them 'without great charge or cost'. These range from correcting the humours through purging and bloodletting, to herbal remedies. There are also some more intriguing treatments. For example, pregnant women were advised to shield themselves from plague by eating toast covered in vinegar, butter, and cinnamon, whilst the poor, who may not be able to afford vinegar and cinnamon, were told they 'may eate bread and butter alone' because butter was seen as a 'preservative against the Plague'. Those who were already suffering from sores could try and ease them with a warmed mixture of onions, butter and garlic, or if your cupboard was bare, you could try simply laying 'a load of bread to it [the sore] hot as it commeth out of the oven'!

In 1603 Shakespeare's acting company, formerly named The Lord Chamberlain's Men under Elizabeth I, became The King's Men under James I.

Their performances were only occasional in 1603 and 1604 – theatres were closed for almost a year due to fears that plague would spread through the crowds. It was around this time (1603-4) that Shakespeare probably wrote [\*Measure for Measure\*](#).

The play is set in Vienna which at the time is afflicted with disease – maybe this play was inspired by the disruption Shakespeare saw around him in plague-sieged London in 1603...

**Vienna is teeming with brothels and loose morality, but the Duke doesn't want to use his authority to clean up the city. He departs, dressed as a friar, leaving his deputy, Angelo, in charge. Angelo is at first reluctant, but he soon starts to make changes.**



## Bear baiting

By far the most popular sport was bear-baiting. In this brutal test, **a bear would be led into a pit and then chained to a stake by its leg or neck.** As spectators cheered and placed bets, a pack of dogs, usually bulldogs or mastiffs, would be unleashed into the arena to torment and attack the bear.





## Upstart Crow

Planning the new Globe, and how to pretend to be a man playing a woman...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-wJiHo1PpA>

The Globe history:

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-globe-theatre/>



The Globe  
theatre – 1612

## Upstart Crow

The planning of Romeo & Juliet...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GV87QWzfu8Y>

Where are you, Rosaline...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgU-x25LNZ8>



The Anchor Inn is one of the oldest inns in London. Records date back to the 1500s.

River pirates would often meet here to sell their stolen wares to the landlord.

The infamous Press Gangs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century would visit here, to capture men to serve in the Royal Navy.

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/overview/press-gangs-/>



Mudlarking described the activity of poor people in London who would scour the foreshore of the river Thames at low tide looking for items they could sell.

Mudlarks were usually children or elderly people living in poverty, who had no other choice for employment.